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SPELLING

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SPELLING REFORM,
FROM AN EDUCATIONAL POINT OF VIEW.



SPELLING REFORM,

From an Educational Point of View.

BY

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SPELLING REFORM,

FROM AN EDUCATIONAL POINT OF VIEW.

THE present movement in favour of a reform in the spelling of the English language has been principally taken up by two classes of the community, the philologists and the teachers. It is of course from an educational point of view that the question is regarded by the School Boards for London, Liverpool, Bradford, Birmingham, and other towns, which are now asking for a Royal Commission of inquiry. The main argument employed by these Boards, and by persons engaged in tuition, is that the present spelling causes a very serious waste of time in teaching to read and write correctly. Yet the vaguest notions

prevail as to the amount of this waste, even by those who have paid attention to the subject. It appeared to me desirable to form some estimate on trustworthy grounds, and to look carefully as an educationist into the other arguments that might be advanced, either for or against the simplification of our orthography.

I tried to determine in the first place how long a time is actually devoted to the arts of spelling and reading; and in the second place how much of this time may be fairly ascribed to the difficulties attending our present unsystematic spelling.

PRESENT EXPENDITURE OF TIME.

In determining the first question I have considered individual cases of no value, as the aptness of the teacher and the pupil are elements for which proper allowance could not

be made ; I have rather sought to obtain evidence from those institutions where education is given on a large scale. Had there existed in our English public schools any general instructions as to the time to be devoted to different subjects, that would have afforded valuable information, and would have virtually answered the question. In default of this I have examined the time-tables of a great many elementary schools, generally talking at the same time with the teachers on the subject. In order that the inquiry should fairly represent the general education of the country I have drawn this evidence from National, British, and Wesleyan schools as well as from Board schools ; and from village schools as well as those in provincial towns and the metropolis. The inquiry has been restricted to Government inspected schools ; and I have had the advantage of learning the opinion of some of the Inspectors.

In infant schools children of three years are set to learn their letters, and various plans are adopted for teaching them their use, until they enter the First Standard. These early stages sometimes appear upon the time-table as reading, sometimes also as letters, spelling, dictation, transcription, or are even included under Kindergarten or writing. It is difficult to tabulate these fairly, but upon adding them together in any particular school I find $6\frac{1}{2}$ hours per week to be a very usual amount of time, while the average of all the schools on my list gives $7\frac{1}{4}$ hours.

In boys' and girls' schools the lessons which we have to consider are spelling, reading, and dictation. Here again there are great diversities of practice, so that it is impossible to tabulate the results satisfactorily. Some teachers give the same amount of time to these subjects in all standards, while others discriminate between the children of different

attainments. The time devoted also appears by my statistics to be as a general rule greater in boys' than in girls' schools; and I believe that this is not accidental.

Spelling lessons, so called, are not given in every school. The subject is often taught only under the head of reading and dictation. Taking a general average of boys and girls of all standards, it seems that in the schools of which I have the statistics, 50 minutes per week are given to the spelling lessons that appear as such on the time-tables. Now as the time devoted to secular instruction may be taken at $22\frac{1}{2}$ hours per week, this gives 3·7 per cent. It must be borne in mind, however, that this does not include the daily ten minutes or so which are very frequently given to actual spelling at the commencement or end of the reading lessons.

Reading lessons are universal, and are given in all standards. The amount of time devoted

to them, however, differs widely. Thus in one of our largest Board schools the First Standard boys get $6\frac{2}{3}$ hours of reading per week, while in the girls' department the same standard has only $2\frac{1}{2}$; but the highest standard boys have only two-thirds of an hour, while the same class of girls have two hours. One of the best known of H. M. Inspectors is not content unless seven hours a week are devoted to reading. The average of my statistics I find to be, for all Standards and for both sexes, $4\frac{1}{4}$ hours; equal to 18.8 per cent. of the school time.

Dictation lessons are intended primarily to teach the children how to spell correctly. I find them universal, and they are considered necessary even in the Sixth Standard: indeed the present code requires of that standard "a short theme or letter, the . . . spelling . . . to be considered." As a rule more time is given to dictation in the lower standards; but sometimes the order is reversed.

The average is almost exactly $2\frac{1}{4}$ hours, equal to 10 per cent.

In many schools home lessons are given with the object of improving the children in spelling; but it is impossible to make any trustworthy estimate of these.

As far, therefore, as the three lessons, spelling, reading, and dictation, are concerned, the average time allotted to them would seem to be about $7\frac{1}{4}$ hours for the infants, and just the same for the boys and girls. This is 32.2 per cent. of the time devoted to secular instruction; or 27.3 per cent. of the whole school time, including the religious exercises and teaching, allowing 4 hours per week for that purpose.

From these data it is easy to calculate that an average English child, spending eight years in school, and making the not unusual amount of 400 attendances per annum, will have spent on an average 2,320 hours in spelling, reading, and dictation; and such a scholar will have

probably acquired sufficient knowledge of the subject to pass the moderate requirements of the Government Inspector in "reading with fluency and expression," and spelling familiar words without error.

But may these 2,320 hours be fairly assumed as the time that has been actually devoted to acquiring the arts of reading and spelling? On the one hand it may be argued that the reading lessons are useful for the information they convey and the general culture which they impart. The same may be said to a modified extent of the dictation lessons, while in regard to them it may be also contended that they give practice in the mere art of writing. They should tend to caligraphy, though some teachers think their influence is the other way.

On the other hand it may be argued that home lessons have been wholly left out of my calculation, and that the three kinds of lessons enumerated by no means exhaust the sources

of instruction in the arts of reading and spelling. Thus a child cannot transcribe from the black-board, or write in its copy-book, without having the spelling of the words impressed on its mind ; and practice in reading is obtained in lessons on history, geography, and most other subjects taught in the school.

Looking at the matter as impartially as I can, I think we may place the one set of considerations against the other, and assume the figures given above as not far from the mark.

We may regard the matter also from a pecuniary point of view. The whole cost of the inspected public elementary schools in England and Wales, whether raised from fees, voluntary subscriptions, or local or imperial taxation, as given in the Report of the Committee of Council on Education, amounted to 3,276,030*l.* for the year 1876-77; but the returns from which this computation was made are confessedly incomplete, and there is internal

evidence to shew that the amount is not less than 3,477,000*l.* But we have already seen that 27·3 per cent. of the whole time of the children's education, religious and secular, is given to reading and spelling, and this proportion of the above estimate amounts to 949,221*l.*; but this does not include the large amount that has to be raised annually in some form or other for the school premises, and which is a necessary charge upon education. It is therefore evident that the money cost of acquiring these necessary accomplishments in the elementary schools considerably exceeds 1,000,000*l.* per annum.

Unfortunately however after all this expenditure of time and money, the great majority of our children leave school unable to read with ease or to spell with decent correctness. The reports of Her Majesty's Inspectors and others furnish superabundant proof of this unsatisfactory result.¹

¹ See Appendix A.

Of course the cost of these rudiments of knowledge to the middle and upper classes has to be added to the foregoing bill in order to include the whole of the population. I have not been able to make any trustworthy estimate of this, and am inclined to think that the children of educated parents learn more quickly; but we may depend upon it spelling comes to no English child by intuition, though we may ourselves have forgotten the processes by which we mastered its perplexities. The Civil Service Examinations shew how lamentably imperfect is this acquirement, even among those who have received a liberal education.

TIME THAT MIGHT BE SAVED.

We now come to the second point of our inquiry, how much of this expenditure of 2,320 hours in learning to spell and read may be

justly attributed to the utter want of system in our orthography.

It seems possible to approach the question in four different ways.

I. *By general considerations.*—If English as written corresponded pretty accurately with English as pronounced, we should still have to teach little children the sounds of the letters and the manner of combining them; and practice would be needed in order to obtain readiness in turning print or writing into speech, or speech into writing. It is possible that the $7\frac{1}{4}$ hours per week in the infant school would still be required, but there would be no necessity for spelling lessons in the boys' and girls' schools, and the dictation lessons would be almost, if not altogether, dispensed with. These amount to 720 hours in the six years, and that amount of time would probably

be saved; but there would also be a large reduction in the time devoted to reading, which always includes more or less spelling; this, however, can hardly be estimated *à priori*.

II. *By experiments made with systematic methods of spelling.*—Children have been taught to read in various parts of England, Scotland, and Ireland by means of books printed on various phonetic and phonic principles, and it is asserted that they have learnt first the systematic and afterwards the ordinary spelling in a shorter time than children usually take to learn the latter alone. Of course this implies a great saving of time, if they had only to learn the first. I do not, however, lay much stress on these experiments, because they have been usually conducted by teachers who have had all the advantage of an enthusiastic attachment to their system. The phonic method of the late Mr. Robinson of Wakefield is being now tried

by the Leeds School Board with very promising results both as to the saving of time and the improvement of the quality of the reading. Another phonic system, that of Leigh, has moreover been carried out in America on so extensive a scale that its results may be accepted as very valuable, if not conclusive. In Sir Charles Reed's report¹ he states—"In Boston, where the children have not more than four or five years' schooling, the uniform result is a saving of half the time, two years' work being done in one." Similar estimates have been made by the School Board of St. Louis, and by the educational authorities of Illinois, Washington, Iowa, and other States.

III. *By comparison with some other languages.*
—The spelling of the Italian language is, as far as I am aware, the most perfect of any in

¹ Blue-Book on the Philadelphia International Exhibition. With reference to this subject see also the article of Mr. James Spedding in the *Nineteenth Century* for June, 1877.

Europe. It is in fact almost strictly phonetic ; that is, each sound is expressed by its own letter, and each letter has but one sound. Every one who has learnt that language knows that the reading and writing of it present no difficulties. I have gathered information from different parts of Italy, and fortunately the detailed programmes of the instruction in elementary schools are published. From them it appears that children begin school at six or seven years of age, and that while in the first class, which usually occupies two years, they learn to read with a correct pronunciation, and do exercises in transcription and dictation. On passing to the second class they acquire the art of reading fluently and with intelligence, and dictation lessons cease at the end of the first four months. As the summer vacation lasts for two months, and all festivals, both civil and religious, are holidays, the number of attendances can scarcely be greater than 360. As

religious instruction and exercises, arithmetic and writing, occupy a large proportion of the five hours *per diem*, ten hours a week may be taken as an outside estimate for learning to read and spell in the first class; while in the second, reading may occupy five hours, and dictation two and a half hours weekly, but the latter only during the first half of the school year. This will give 945 hours, instead of 2,320, and indicates that an Italian child of about nine years of age will read and spell at least as correctly as most English children when they leave school at thirteen, though the Italian child was two years later in beginning his lessons.

The spelling of the German language is incomparably better than our own, yet many mute letters are employed, and several sounds are capable of being represented in more ways than one. I have obtained information from educational authorities in various parts of

Prussia, Saxony, Wirtemberg, Baden, and Hamburg; and that with regard to all classes of society. The German child seems usually to begin his schooling everywhere at six years of age, and the general testimony is that he learns in two years, if not in a shorter time, to read distinctly and correctly books which are not above his comprehension. The most detailed letter I have received is from the Principal of one of the Communal schools at Berlin, and without knowing the object of my inquiry he throws considerable light upon it. He describes the progress of a scholar during each year, and states that at the expiration of the second year the pupil reads aloud and correctly in both German and Roman characters, he spells from memory, and writes dictations with pen and paper in German hand, the words being limited to those in which the spoken vowels correspond to the written. But the German child has in the next year to learn to write in

Roman characters, and to be initiated into double consonants and other orthographical mysteries ; in the fourth year he attains the power of reading with correct accentuation, and writes a dictation correctly, distinguishing between ä and e, äu and eu, ei and ai. It appears, therefore, that the irregularities of German spelling, trifling as they are when compared with ours, greatly prolong the time required ; yet a German child of ten is about on a par as to spelling and reading with our Fifth Standard children, and is thus saved about two years' time, though he commenced to learn later.

But a still more rapid result seems to be attained wherever the Schreiblese-methode has been introduced. A pamphlet published in Stuttgart, which describes in minute detail the course of instruction in the elementary schools, shews that in the first school year (that is, from six to seven) eleven and a-half hours per week are given to the primer, writing, and

transcribing ; during the next two years eight and a half hours per week are devoted to reading, writing, and dictation ; but after that the reading becomes what we should designate as literature, science, and history, while the dictation lessons are reduced to half an hour per week, and they are continued till the child is fourteen, principally for the purpose of teaching unusual and foreign words. This gives an aggregate of 1,302 hours for the forty-two weeks, which is the usual school year in Germany. But this can hardly be compared with the English 2,320 hours, for the German estimate includes the time given to the early stages of writing, and that in two distinct sets of characters.¹

The Dutch, Danish, and Swedish languages are spelt better than our own, though their orthography is by no means perfect. The information which I have received from these countries does not give definite numerical data,

¹ See Appendix B.

but it shews that reading at least is acquired more quickly than with us. As to Sweden, I am assured, on the authority of Mr. Ekman, the School Board Inspector of the Upsala district, that "the children in the Swedish Board Schools as a rule are able to read fluently and to write correctly at the age of nine to ten years." A very interesting account of an experiment at Stockholm upon an improved mode of teaching to read will be found in the Appendix.¹

The spelling of the French language, though much more systematic than our own, has peculiarities which render it almost as difficult; and consequently we find that a very large amount of time has to be expended in transcription and dictation. In the elementary schools of Geneva lessons in spelling have to be given in the sixth grade, which corresponds to our highest standard.

¹ See Appendix C.

IV. *By inquiries among bilingual populations.*—In the Government schools of Malta the children are taught, not their vernacular, which is an unwritten Arabic, but two languages equally foreign to them—Italian and English. They commence them simultaneously, and learn to read the Italian very easily by means of a box of movable letters, while they are sorely puzzled with the English.

I recently examined several of the children in the Anglo-Italian night school, near Leather Lane, and satisfied myself of the ease with which they acquired the power of reading and spelling Italian. In reply to inquiries as to the comparative time a child ignorant of letters, but understanding English and Italian equally well, would take to learn how to read and write each language correctly, the Principal estimated that the English language would require about twice the time of the Italian.

From inquiries which I have made among

the Anglo-German schools in London, the general result seems to be that the children acquire as great a proficiency in reading and writing German in eighteen months as they do English in two years. These schools are six in number, and some are in very poor, and some in respectable neighbourhoods.

The Germans in America—a very numerous body—are loud in their cry for a spelling reform, on account of their children being subjected to a difficulty through the English orthography, which they themselves never experienced.

Welsh when printed appears uncouth to the English eye, and the duplicated consonants are unphilosophical enough; yet it is spelt consistently. The consequence is that among the bilingual population of the Principality, while English reading and writing have to be laboriously learnt at school, Welsh is learned without effort at home and in the Sunday-schools, and books and newspapers in the Welsh language

are found everywhere. In the Highlands of Scotland, on the contrary, a similar people, speaking another branch of the same language, but spelling it etymologically, cannot learn to read Gaelic without regular school teaching, and are almost devoid of current literature.

It seems a fair inference from these various facts and lines of argument, that if English orthography represented English pronunciation as closely as the Italian does, at least half the time and expense of teaching to read and to spell would be saved. This may be taken as 1,200 hours in a lifetime, and as more than half a million of money per annum for England and Wales alone.

It would be a false economy to retain this saving in the ratepayers' pockets, and to turn the children out of school a year or two earlier than at present. The true course would be to devote the time and money so saved to the teaching of other subjects which will have a

practical bearing upon their future lives. In the elementary schools of Italy, though the aggregate time of schooling is shorter, the children learn much about the laws of health, and domestic and social economy. In Germany they acquire considerable knowledge of literature and science, and in Holland they take up foreign languages. It is lamentable how small a proportion of our scholars ever advance beyond the mere rudiments of learning; a circumstance the more to be regretted as they will have to compete with those foreign workmen whose early education was not weighted with an absurd and antiquated orthography.

OTHER ADVANTAGES.

Although the main argument in favour of a spelling reform, from an educational point of view, is that which has been already set forth,

there are many minor advantages which would result from the adoption of a more rational system.

1st. *Reduction in the cost of printing.*—The amount of saving would depend very much upon the system adopted. The mere removal of duplicated consonants would save 1·6 per cent., and of the mute *e*'s an additional 4 per cent. In the New Testament printed in phonetic type in 1849, by Alexander J. Ellis, 100 letters and spaces are represented by 83. As far as printing and paper are concerned, therefore, a six-shilling book would be reduced to five shillings. Such a benefit ought to be welcomed by newspaper proprietors, advertisers, and the public generally.

2nd. *The furnishing a means of indicating the correct pronunciation.*—At present if we meet with a strange word or a new proper

name we are very often at a loss how to pronounce it. Who has not felt this in reading the newspaper aloud? Now any uniform plan of representing sounds would furnish the writer with a means of indicating in what way any new word was to be pronounced. It is not necessary for this purpose that our own patronymic, for instance, or any foreign name, should be altered in its spelling,—the pronunciation might be written in brackets beside it; nor is it necessary that any very philosophical mode of spelling should be adopted. The necessary enlargement of our vocal signs may be obtained either by new letters, or by the consistent use of digraphs (compound letters such as *ch* and *ou*), or by diacritical marks such as are used in most pronouncing dictionaries. All that is essential for this particular purpose is that the system, whatever it be, should be generally understood.

Let me illustrate this by an example. Last

summer I joined an excursion up the river Tamar to Cothele. Now on considering this word of seven letters I saw there were twenty-seven ways of pronouncing it in accordance with the analogy of English words and names. I dared not utter the word, the chances were evidently so much against my being right, but I listened carefully for it from the lips of one who could be depended upon, and I found that it was different from any of my twenty-seven. I could write the pronunciation according to the systems of Walker or Webster, Pitman or Ellis, or of the Indian Government, or in Italian or German, so that any one would be sure to pronounce the name correctly, provided only that he knew the system employed.¹

3rd. *The reduction of dialects.*—In such writing as the Chinese, where the signs represent ideas and not sounds, there is

¹ See Appendix D.

nothing to prevent dialects in the process of time becoming so very divergent that people who read the same literature cannot understand one another's speech. Such is the case in the different provinces of the Chinese Empire. Where, as in almost every other written language, the signs represent sounds, this is scarcely possible. The English language, however, in having partly retained its old spelling and partly changed it in arbitrary ways with little regard to the gradual changes of pronunciation, has in great measure lost its power of suggesting the true sound of the words. Hence the English dialects are not corrected by the practice of reading. With the Italian it is quite otherwise. The language as spoken in the different States into which Italy was formerly divided is pronounced very differently, and one object of the present Government in promoting education is to introduce everywhere what is considered the

national tongue. In the schools the children are taught to speak the classic language, and their reading lessons shew them the correct pronunciation of the words. Hence they come to drop their provincial mode of speech, first at school, then in places of public resort, and eventually even in the family. After a while it is expected that a uniformity of speech will prevail throughout the entire kingdom.

The existence of the English dialects, notwithstanding the wide diffusion of our literature, is a significant fact, and is an additional argument in favour of such a system of spelling as shall render their long continuance impossible.

4th. *The gain to philology.*—We can scarcely doubt that philology would gain, and not lose, when we find that the greatest philologists both of England and America are the most ardent

advocates of spelling reform.¹ Nevertheless, it is often urged as an argument against clearing away the ruins of ancient forms of our language that we "should lose the etymology of our words." Who would lose it? Not the great mass of English-speaking children, who will never learn any language but their own, for to them the old letters now unsounded will never be anything more than an unintelligible puzzle. Not our sons and daughters who will learn Latin and Greek, and Anglo-Saxon, for they will assuredly in any case learn to read (and probably to write) the present style; and the differences between the reformed spelling and the unreformed will direct their attention to these etymological survivals more forcibly than anything else could possibly do. The

¹ Such as Professors Max Müller and Sayce of Oxford; Skeat of Cambridge; Meiklejohn of St. Andrew's; Doctors Angus, Morris, and Murray, of London; Mr. Sweet, President of the Philological Society; and Professors Whitney, Marsh, and Haldeman of the United States of America.

only possible losers will be the learned portion of some generation in the far future, when the old spelling has become obsolete ; and even they, if this etymological knowledge is worth possessing, will only have to learn to read the then archaic style, just as every one, rich or poor, has to learn it now.

There would be another and more important gain to philology. What we want to know is not merely what English was when it first became a separate tongue, and what it is now, but by what stages this gradual transition has taken place. Had our ancestors preserved an absolutely unchanged orthography, we should have known nothing of this ; had they always written phonetically, we should have been able to trace this perfectly by means of the spelling used by authors in successive centuries. But they have done neither the one nor the other, and the changes made have been without any system ; thus the knowledge

of the history of our language is utterly and hopelessly confused. The best service we can now render to philology in the future is to write exactly as we speak in the present.

5th. *The substitution of a healthy for a vicious mental training.*—At present a young child is taught in its reading and spelling lessons to distrust analogy and its sense of right, to break rules without apparent reason, and to rely on authority against evidence. Under a rational system of spelling the same child would find that the lesson of one day was a step to the next; its instinct of order would be strengthened, and its logical sense developed.

6th. *The extension of the English language.*—Our language is one of the easiest to learn as far as the grammatical construction is concerned, and it is singularly rich both in its

vocabulary and literature. With our immense empire, and the widespread ramifications of our commerce, it might become the general means of communication between all nations, were it not that we impose the double task of learning both the spoken and the written language. If these two were brought into harmony English would be more generally learnt, and that would be an immense advantage both to ourselves, and to the Celtic population of our own islands, the native inhabitants of India and our colonies, and all foreigners who may have relations with us.

OBJECTIONS.

It would indeed be strange if so important a reform were attended with no disadvantages and difficulties; and it is only right to give full attention and weight to all the objections which may be urged against it.

Foremost among these, at least in the mouths of intelligent people, is usually the statement that the proposed change would sever the continuity of our written language, and cause us to lose much that is of value in regard to the history and origin of words. I thought so once myself; but have gradually arrived at the conclusion already expressed, that philology would gain more than it would lose by the change. For a complete and detailed answer to this class of objections I must simply refer the reader to Professor Max Müller's article on the subject in the *Fortnightly Review* for 1876.¹

Others state that by changing the spelling our national literature would be spoilt, and the associations with the past destroyed. It may be sufficient to remind the reader that our Bible and Prayer-book, Shakespeare and Milton, are now spelt very differently to what

¹ Reprinted by F. Pitman, 20, Paternoster Row. Price $\frac{1}{2}d$.

they originally were, and are none the worse for it.

Another class of objections is that our libraries will be rendered useless, our whole typographical arrangements upset, and that all our educational appliances would have to be remodelled. These objections could only have force were the change of spelling effected by some sudden revolution compulsorily enforced, a procedure which, as far as I am aware, no spelling reformer has ever advocated. It is quite certain that, in whatever shape a new mode of spelling may come, its introduction will be slow and gradual. It will resemble the transition from manuscripts to printed books, from black letter to the common type, or from the ancient Roman numerals to the present Arabic notation. All these have taken place without any catastrophe. As, however, no changes can be effected without inconvenient results in some quarters, spelling

reformers will have need to consider how to secure the maximum of advantage with the minimum of inconvenience.

Some dread the labour of having to learn what they call a new language; let such console themselves with the reflexion that they need never write it; and as to reading, the most thorough phonetic spelling is far more easily read than those exaggerations of our irregular spelling in which some of the American humorists delight, and which we read for our amusement. It is almost needless to say that there will be nothing to *unlearn*, as some people foolishly imagine.

There is another class of objections which I do not know how to answer seriously. Many persons think that any unfamiliar spelling looks ugly, or that a more phonetic mode of writing is ludicrous, or wrong, or a proof of ignorance. I do not doubt that when the Roman type was introduced, many who were accustomed to the

old black-letter could not bear the nasty, thin, plain-looking modern characters ; and we have heard of a student who, when examined about his knowledge of Chaucer, replied, “ Chaucer was a writer who deserved some merit, but unfortunately he could not spell.”

During the last thirty years I have had frequent conversations with objectors, but it has been my universal experience that among intelligent people the supposed advantages of the present spelling have on investigation become more and more insignificant, while the great advantages of bringing our writing into agreement with our pronunciation have become more and more evident.

The difficulty of the reformer really consists in his running counter to the prepossession in favour of what is familiar, a difficulty formidable enough to tax all our courage and patience.

SPELLING REFORM IN OTHER COUNTRIES.

It may be a source both of encouragement and instruction to note what reforms are proposed or are actually in progress in other countries.

In the Italian and Spanish languages the spelling has already been brought into almost perfect conformity with the pronunciation. In these, therefore, there is nothing to justify any agitation for further reform.

Although little fault can be found with the German spelling as compared with the English and French, the educationists of that country and the Governments of the different States have long been desirous of simplifying it. In 1854 meetings were held both at Hanover and Leipzig, which resulted in certain modifications of the spelling being rendered obligatory in the

Hanoverian higher schools. This was followed in 1860 by Wirtemberg, which adopted a reformed orthography for its elementary as well as its upper schools; and by Austria in 1861, and by Bavaria in 1866. But the changes adopted by these several States are not the same; and so imminent did the danger appear of having a different mode of writing and printing in different parts of Germany, that a conference of delegates from the several Governments was held at Dresden in October, 1872. This led to the Prussian Minister of Education, Dr. Falk, proposing that a competent scholar, Professor von Raumer, should draw up a scheme; and this met with the approval of all the Governments. The scheme thus prepared was privately printed and sent to the respective Governments, and then submitted to a Ministerial Commission, consisting of Von Raumer and eleven other educationists, together with a printer and a publisher. The

Commission met in January, 1876, and approved of the scheme with certain modifications; and a report of the whole proceedings has been drawn up and printed.¹ The proposals of the Commissioners are now before the German nation for criticism, but at present there seems little hope for unanimity except as regards the limitation of capital letters at the beginning of words, the banishment of many of the superfluous letters, and the general adoption of the Roman character. In the meantime there has arisen a movement in favour of a purely phonetic reform, the advocates of which are dissatisfied with the half measures of the Government, and are making strenuous efforts to secure the public approval of their more advanced scheme.²

¹ *Verhandlungen der zur Herstellung grösserer Einigung in der deutschen Rechtschreibung berufenen Konferenz. Veröffentlicht im Auftrage des Königlichen Preussischen Unterrichtsministers.* Halle, 1876.

² *Academy*, November 24, 1877.

Up to the beginning of the present century the spelling of the Dutch language was very unsettled. In 1804 the movement for reform assumed a definite shape through the essay of Professor von Siegenbeek; and the greatly improved spelling that bears his name was the only official and authorised one till 1873. Then some important changes were proposed by De Vries and Te Winkel, and these are now adopted by the different departments of Government. I believe, however, that there are other systems which receive official sanction, and we can only hope that the result will be "the survival of the fittest."

Similar movements for reform are taking place in the Scandinavian kingdoms. The Swedish spelling appears to be about equal in quality to the German, but for the last 100 years or thereabouts attempts have been made by competent persons to establish a purely phonetic system, and the Swedish Academy

has adopted some of their proposals and embodied them in a model spelling book ; but the Government has taken no part in the matter, and there is consequently much diversity in practice. In Denmark the movement originated with some learned men and school-masters, and it has resulted in a Government decree, confirming certain regulations with respect to double consonants, the silent *e* and *d*, the abolition of *g*, and some other points. These “official” changes are not obligatory ; but they are winning their way both in public and private schools ; and the use of the Gothic character has almost ceased. About ten years ago a meeting of scholars from Sweden, Norway, and Denmark took place, with the object of establishing a phonetic mode of spelling which should be common to the Scandinavian languages.

Coming to our own mother tongue, the question of spelling reform has advanced much

further in the United States of America than at home. There exists a powerful association for the purpose; and an international convention for the amendment of English orthography was held in Philadelphia in August, 1876. The Legislature of the State of Connecticut has taken the lead by appointing a commission of six competent persons "who shall examine as to the propriety of adopting an amended orthography of the public documents hereafter to be printed." A similar course of action has probably by this time been adopted by the two houses of Legislature in Pennsylvania.

Our own Government has had to face the question in the spelling of Indian proper names. Not only has it defined the spelling to be officially employed, but (with certain exceptions) has adopted a system by which the various sounds are uniformly represented by certain letters or combinations of letters. The ordinary English alphabet has been found

sufficient for the purpose, except that all the vowels have been made to do double duty by employing them with or without a dash, and certain well-understood digraphs, such as *kh* for the guttural, are employed. This orthography is not only adopted in legislative enactments, in maps, in the post-office and telegraph departments, &c., but is also making its way into general use.

CONCLUSION.

On considering these movements for reform which are taking place in other countries, two reflexions force themselves upon us. 1st. If the educational authorities of Germany, Holland, Sweden, and Denmark consider it desirable that their written language should be simplified, how much more incumbent is it upon us, who are weighted in all our schools with a vastly more cumbersome and irrational

spelling. 2nd. The tentative efforts of reformers constitute a real danger unless there be some authority able and willing to examine the various schemes proposed, and to express an unprejudiced opinion on their merits.

During the past year or two the question of amending our spelling has advanced beyond the narrow circle of scholars and theoretical reformers ; it is felt by educationists to be a great necessity, and rival systems of reform are discussed before the public, while the defence of the present want of system is generally given up as hopeless. The practical solution however is surrounded with difficulties, and at the present time our Government is, undesignedly no doubt, but none the less surely, placing an impassable barrier in the way of any alteration. By insisting upon what the Inspectors consider to be correct spelling in our elementary schools, and in our Civil Service and other examinations, it is stereotyping our

written language as it has never been stereotyped before. One of the first requirements is the toleration at least of some alternative system or systems, and no authority could examine the various proposals with so much advantage as a Royal Commission composed of the ablest men in the country, which shall command the respect not only of the British public in general, but also of the English-speaking populations in America, Australia, India, and other lands.¹

¹ See Appendix E.

APPENDICES.

A P P E N D I C E S.

APPENDIX A.

AMONG the most recent evidence of the backward state of spelling and reading in our schools the following may be quoted.

“Let us take the three R’s first: of these, though the percentage of passes is largest in reading, I hold reading to be the subject worst done. . . . No one will ever read in later life unless reading is quite easy to him, and I believe that no child leaving school before attaining the Fifth Standard can read with the facility necessary to make reading a pleasure. Thus children who receive certificates under Labour Acts will in all probability never touch a book again after leaving school. . . . Spelling must always remain a great difficulty in a language so arbitrary as ours.”—*General Report for the year 1876, by Her Majesty’s Inspector, R. F. BOYLE, ESQ.*

“A very serious blemish in the papers of the scholars of the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Standards is faulty spelling. . . . The inaccuracies of spelling which did not imply a misconception of the meaning of quoted passages, and which were therefore held by the examiners to be of no account, were, I regret to say, exceedingly numerous in the papers of the competitors of the Sixth Standard. These children were supposed to be the pick of their respective schools, and yet about forty per cent. of them spelt *there for their* and *vice versa*.”—*Report on the Examination in Scripture Knowledge, 1877.* By T. M. WILLIAMS, ESQ., *Inspector to the School Board for London.*

“I have been in the habit for many years of taking boys to read to me. I always take them from the Sixth Standard. They are unable to read aloud tolerably, and have no idea of the pronunciation of the language. The only remedy for this, in my opinion, is to teach all the thirty-nine sounds, together with the letter which represents each of them.”—*Letter of the Rt. Hon. ROBERT LOWE, M.P., of May 21, 1877.*

APPENDIX B.

The following are some of the evidence from other parts of Germany :—

“According to the Schreiblese-methode, which has been introduced into the schools of Saxony, a child of ordinary intelligence, having two to three hours instruction per day (where the classes exceed fifty they have four hours) learns in one year to read, write and do the four rules of simple arithmetic up to ten. At the end of the second school year, at the age of eight, such a child is usually able to read fluently, and with a fair apprehension of its meaning, any piece of printing put before it whether in German or Roman characters.” — *Letter of Privy Councillor BORNEMANN, Education Department, Dresden.*

“In the higher educational establishments (Gymnasien, Real-schulen and upper Bürger-schulen) children between the age of six and seven years learn to read and write in six months, on receiving one hour’s instruction per diem. In the elementary schools (Volks-schulen) nine months are required. These

results are only obtained by using the Schreiblese-methode, which, as the more natural one, is preferable to the simple 'look and say,' or alphabetical method."—*Letter of Dr. SCHUSTER, Director of the Real-schule, first order, Hanover.*

"After the first year's schooling (the children enter at the age of six and six and a half) the average result is that the scholars have learnt to read easy sentences in the primer distinctly and correctly: also to write, inasmuch as both go hand in hand in the Schreiblese-methode. Such a result cannot be achieved in the English language on account of the difficulties in its pronunciation and spelling."—*Letter of Dr. OTTO, of Heidelberg.*

"The age at which children are required to attend school is from six to fourteen. During the first year they learn to read without difficulty both the German and Latin characters, written as well as printed. . . . At nine years old, *i.e.*, after three years' schooling, almost all the children are perfect in orthography."—*Letter of B. L. LEESON, of Hamburg.*

APPENDIX C.

“On the 15th of August last, 100 children, boys and girls, between six and seven years of age, were admitted into the Clara Parochial School, and divided into three classes, each having a separate room and a separate teacher. The actual instruction of these children commenced on the 20th August, and it was proved in the presence of 300 male and female teachers, that they knew nothing at all, but were entirely ignorant of reading and writing. During the first days of October an examination took place in presence of the assembled teachers, the members of the school council, and of the Minister of Education, and it was ascertained that in one class, containing thirty children and under the tuition of the ablest schoolmistress, all the children, without a single exception, could read slowly, easy passages, not before practised or read, both in print and in writing.

“In writing the progress was very varied. The best pupils could write very neatly on slates from a written copy on the black board. In arithmetic they could employ the numbers one to ten in addition, subtrac-

tion, multiplication, and division. They had also learnt some Bible history from *vivid voce* instruction; and their powers of conception had been considerably developed by means of object-lessons.

“The pronunciation of these children was, from the outset, tolerably correct, because here in Stockholm the language spoken is pretty pure and free from dialect. As to the other two classes, it may suffice to say, that they had not made quite the same progress. The method of instruction employed is the Laut-Schreiblese-methode. This method is in use in all the schools here—and, of course, also in the other parts of the country, although as yet it has not become quite general.

“It should be noticed that the Swedish language in its unison of pronunciation and spelling is well adapted for this method. The German is somewhat more difficult in that respect—but the French, and especially the English language, place great obstacles in the way of this method of teaching.

“Without therefore being able to give a positive reply regarding the average time necessary for teaching to read, I may conclude my observations by saying, that with a suitable method, competent teachers, and somewhat favourable circumstances, the following results have been and may be realised :—

“Firstly. In about six to eight weeks the slow reading of ordinary Swedish words.

“Secondly. In about six to eight months perfect, mechanical reading.”—*Letter of Dr. C. J. MEYERBERG, Inspector of Schools in Stockholm. November 10th, 1877.*

APPENDIX D.

In the word Cothele the letter *o* may be pronounced in three ways, as in cot, cross, or cotemporary; the *th* may have also three sounds, as in this, thistle, or hothouse; while *ele* may be a disyllable with the first *e* either long or short, as in electricity or elephant, or a monosyllable, as in bronchocele. Now $3 \times 3 \times 3 = 27$. In point of fact the *h* is mute; and the correct pronunciation would be written by

Walker,—Dictionary	...	Kôtêl.
Webster,—Dictionary	...	€ôtêl.
Pitman, Ellis, and Withers...		Catel.
Pitman,—Phonotypy	...	Këtil.
Ellis,—Glossic	...	Koateel.
“ Anglo-American System ”		Côteel.
Indian Government	...	Kotîl.
Italian	...	Cotil.
German	...	Kotiel.
Dutch	...	Kootiel.

These are all different, but are all practically phonetic, and any one of them would convey the true pronunciation of "Cothele" to any adult reader who had given half an hour's attention to the alphabet employed. It is not, however, to be supposed that they are all equally good.

APPENDIX E.

“There is much that might be done with advantage in the reform of spelling as to the English language; but the main thing is, that whatever may be proposed should be proposed with the weight of great authority to back it. The best plan, if proposed without such backing, will in my opinion only tend to promote confusion. I should advise those who are interested—and very justly interested in this question—to busy themselves not so much with considering what should be done as with considering in what way opinion can be brought to bear on the matter, and some organ framed to inquire what should be proposed. It is not in my power to offer to give any time under present circumstances to the undertaking which I recommend, and in which I should gladly have found myself able to join.”—*Letter of the Rt. Hon. W. E. GLADSTONE to Mr. E. JONES, June 27th, 1874.*

“What he would like to see was an inquiry on the part of the Government amongst educators in

all countries—that there should be a careful investigation made and a careful report presented, and if any change could be effected, it should be a gradual change going on side by side with the present system, something like the tonic sol-fa system, going on side by side with the old system of notation, so that learning would be made easier for the children of the next generation if not for the present."—*Report of Speech by Sir CHARLES REED, at Leicester, October 30th, 1875.*

"Our absence of any authority with such a function as the reviewing of our spelling and the making it rational is well known. Englishmen generally profess to be proud of it. I am myself disposed to think that a Royal Commission might with advantage be charged, not indeed with the absurd task of inventing a brand-new spelling, but with the task of reviewing our present spelling, of pointing out evident anomalies in it, of suggesting feasible amendments of it. But such a Commission should be permanent, with the function of watching our language, by no means of stereotyping it; and, though appointed by Government in the first instance, it should recruit itself, as vacancies arose, by coöptation."—*Report of MATTHEW ARNOLD, ESQ., H.M. Inspector, 1877.*

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